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## EARLY METHODISM IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

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(Read before the Society, May 9, 1904.)

The religious movement known as Methodism began in America about 1766, almost simultaneously in New York and Maryland. Its growth was rapid. In a few years it had spread from those original seats along the Atlantic coast,—north and south,—and was pushing westward with the tide of population. In 1772, Robert Williams, who three years before had come from England on private business, but who seeing the great opportunity the colonies afforded for the advancement of the Kingdom of God, had become an itinerant, and labored with great success in Maryland, introduced Methodism into Georgetown. In the same year Francis Asbury, who has the distinction of being the first bishop, of any church, to be consecrated on the soil of America, visited the place in the further establishment of the denomination. The first conference in America was held in Philadelphia, June 14, 1773. There were but ten preachers present, comprising, with the exception of two, the whole clerical force of American Methodism. Four of them were assigned to work on the Baltimore Circuit, which included all of Maryland. These men—Francis Asbury, Robert Strawbridge, Abraham Whitworth and Joseph Yearbry—were the first regular pastors of Georgetown, which belonged to that great circuit. The society had no permanent place of worship until 1795, when the first church was built,

during the pastorate of John Chalmers and William Bishop. It was located on Montgomery Street. Its dimensions were thirty by forty feet, and it is said to have been "of very ordinary finish." The present church on Dumbarton Avenue dates from 1849, having been built largely through the instrumentality and during the pastorate of Henry Slicer. For one hundred and thirty-four years the Georgetown Society has existed, making it one of the oldest in the United States, and the mother church of the denomination in the District of Columbia. Before the retrocession of that part of the territory south of the Potomac to the State of Virginia in 1846, Alexandria was comprised in the District of Columbia, and hence comes properly under notice in this paper. In the same year in which Robert Williams introduced Methodism into Georgetown, John King came on the same mission to Alexandria. He was an Englishman, a graduate of Oxford University, and also of a medical school in London. Receiving a license to preach after he came to America, he immediately began his extraordinary ministry. To him belongs the honor of introducing Methodism into Baltimore, Md., where, while preaching on the street corner, on training day, he was mobbed by drunken militiamen. It is said of him that "possessing great energy and earnestness, he went like a flame of fire throughout the country." He often became boisterous in his preaching. John Wesley, under whose authority the Methodist preachers in America were still laboring, hearing of this, wrote to him from England:

"Scream no more at the peril of your life. . . . I never scream, I never strain myself, I dare not. I know it would be a sin against God and my own soul."

In 1777 King was compelled to cease traveling, and located at Raleigh, N. C., where he died not long after-

wards. At first Alexandria seems to have been in charge of the pastors of the Baltimore and Frederick Circuits. In 1779 the Fairfax Circuit was formed, and it became a part of the new charge. In 1791 it became a separate station with Ezekiel Cooper, "the walking cyclopædia," as pastor. During this year the cornerstone of the District was laid, just outside of Alexandria, and Mr. Cooper has left an account of it. In 1792 the session of the Baltimore Conference was held there. At first the services of the church were held in private houses, or in such places as might be conveniently used for that purpose. Bishop Asbury frequently visited the place, preaching in the court-house, and occasionally in the Presbyterian church, whose pastor was friendly to the new denomination. On the 26th of May, 1785, he, accompanied by Bishop Coke, the latter a British subject, proceeded from Alexandria to Mount Vernon, to visit Washington, and presented to the President an address pledging to the young republic the support of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which had been organized in Baltimore at a conference held on the preceding Christmas. In 1786 Asbury started a movement for the erection of a church edifice which was finally accomplished. For many years Alexandria was under the jurisdiction of the Baltimore Conference, but became a part of the Virginia Conference at its organization in 1867, the results of the civil war on the fortunes of the church, making necessary an adjustment of the territory of the border states.

In the literature of Methodism no account is given of its origin in the Capital of the nation. The earliest official mention of it is found in the "Minutes of Conferences" for 1802, when Washington is given in the list of appointments in connection with Georgetown. This has no bearing upon the date of its establishment.

It shows that at that time a change was made in the boundaries of some of the pastoral charges, and that Washington had become sufficiently important to be named in the official title of the charge. The society from some cause must have become influential by this date to be thus mentioned, for it never has been customary to put the name of a society in the official title of a charge, until it has become about equal in strength or influence to any other society which may be associated with it in pastoral relations. If there were nothing else to account for this, the growing importance of Washington as the new and *permanent* capital of the country would be sufficient. Another instance will illustrate this feature of the polity of Methodism more fully and give additional support to this argument. Georgetown itself may be chosen. It is certain that the denomination existed in that place several years prior to the War of American Independence. Yet no official recognition of that fact is given in the "Minutes of Conferences." It does not appear in the list of appointments until 1801, only one year before the appearance of the name of Washington, and then only for the reason that it had grown sufficiently to become a separate charge. Many other instances could be given if they were needed.

Some other significant circumstances point to an earlier date than 1802. Methodism was planted in the territory surrounding Washington at an early date, and it is incredible that this locality, which came into such prominence during the last decade of the eighteenth century, by having been selected as the seat of the national capital, should have been completely ignored by the pioneers of the church.

Methodism was planted in Georgetown in 1772, as we have seen. Since 1791 the city of Washington had

been growing up by its side, and according to the census of 1800 had reached a population of over three thousand. It is impossible to believe that it should have been entirely overlooked by the pastors and presiding elders of the Frederick and Montgomery Circuits in whose bounds it was situated. Methodism very early secured a foothold at Bladensburg. It also was a part of the Frederick and Montgomery Circuits, and the preachers going thence to Georgetown, passing over the old Bladensburg road, crossed a part of the territory now occupied by the city. Is it conceivable that in the ten years of the city's existence they would not have sought many opportunities to preach the Word of Life to its increasing population? Alexandria, Va., has been the seat of a society of Methodism since almost the earliest days, as shown above.

It was a thriving society, as the annual reports show. Can it be that Washington, so near to that place as to be almost in sight, should not have become an object of concern to them? Methodism existed all around the national capital from 1790 to 1800. It passes our belief that it should not have been established here. Again, that period was preëminently the seedtime of the church. Its ministers were every day seeking new fields in which to plant the seed of the Kingdom. There were one hundred pastoral charges reported in the United States in 1790. There were two hundred ten years later. Most of these charges contained a number of preaching places, showing probably two thousand places as the nuclei of Methodist societies. Places far less important and promising were eagerly entered and what good reason can be given why this city should not have been included in this forward movement?

Again, this region was not without population even

in the earliest years of the last decade of the eighteenth century. Besides the farms, with their necessary inhabitants, there were at least two considerable villages—Carrollsbury and Hamburg. They had been laid out twenty years when this territory was chosen as the site of the capital city. Dr. Busey in his "Pictures of the City of Washington in the Past," says, page 39:

"At the time of the location of the site of the Federal City, Carrollsbury and Hamburg were flourishing settlements, without corporate rights and privileges."

Again on page 29 Dr. Busey says:

"Washington prospected in person (March 29, 1791) the site he had chosen, which included the flourishing settlements of Carrollsbury and Hamburg."

Again on page 323\* he says:

"Carrollsbury and Hamburg were thriving local villages, with populations sufficient in number to add variety and attraction to the family-circle, and diversity to the home-scenes of the neighboring farm-houses."

This being true, their neglect by the preachers of that period, who were almost without exception aggressive evangelists, would have shown a surprising departure from a method pursued by them, invariably, in every other part of the country.

Another circumstance points to an earlier date for the beginning of Methodism in this city. It will be remembered that, at first, Washington was called Federal City. In the list of appointments for 1794 Federal appears for the first time in place of Severn. Severn Circuit evidently covered the territory between Annapolis and the Potomac River, bounded by the Frederick, Montgomery and Prince George circuits. Why should

\* When writing of the social life of the District at the time of its acquisition by the general Government.

the name Severn be dropped and Federal put in its place except for the fact that the church was being established in the Federal City. One Methodist family, at least, is known to have been in the Federal City in 1794. John and Elizabeth Lipscomb came from Prince William County, Va., in that year, having been converted under the ministry of Francis Asbury. They gave three sons to the ministry. Andrew A. Lipscomb, distinguished as preacher, educator and author, was a grandson. It may have been that this family was the nucleus of Washington Methodism. They afterward removed to Georgetown.

Federal continues in the list of appointments until 1806, when it disappears, and Severn is restored. By this time the designation of Washington as the Federal City had ceased. But once more on this line. When Congress convened for the first time in this city, there was a lively contention among the clergymen for the post of chaplain to the two houses. There were many candidates for the places—an Episcopalian, a Methodist, a Baptist, three Presbyterians, and a Millennialist. The result of this struggle for political office may be found in the *Journals of Congress* of November 27, 1800, showing that the Right Reverend Bishop Claggett had been duly elected chaplain of the Senate, and Rev. Thomas Lyell chaplain of the House. Who was Rev. Thomas Lyell? "The Minutes of the Conferences" show that he was one of the pastors of Federal, or in other words, of the Methodists of Washington City, having been appointed to that post in May, 1800. This points unmistakably to an earlier date than 1802 as the time of the establishment of Methodism in the national capital.

The first known place of worship of the Methodists in Washington was located within the original bounds



of Carrollsburg, at Greenleaf's Point. Fronting on South Capitol and N Streets stood "The Twenty Buildings." They were two-story and basement houses, with stone foundations and bricks above. In one of these the first society held religious services for several years. None of these buildings remain at the present time. In the changes of population they became notorious as the resort of disreputable characters. Tradition has it that they were at length burned out by some persons, who chose this method of ridding the neighborhood of an intolerable nuisance. On account of the large increase of the congregation the society moved from Greenleaf's Point to another location. The place of worship now chosen by the Methodists, while more commodious than the one they were leaving, was certainly not more elegant. On New Jersey Avenue, south of D Street, there stood, at the beginning of the last century, a building which had served for years as a tobacco house for the Carrolls of Duddington Manor. Into this structure the Methodists moved when they migrated from Greenleaf's Point. It had an interesting history. Before it became a Methodist meeting-house, it was used for the same purpose by the Protestant Episcopalians, and called Christ's Church, and was the predecessor of the present Christ's Church on G Street, S. E. It served the double purpose of church and school house. It was a hip-roof structure built of wood. The main entrance was on the south side. The windows, put in to make it suitable for its new uses, were small and far from the ground, and amply protected by solid shutters. The Methodists worshipped here about four years. It was a period of solid prosperity. The pastors were among the strongest men in the church, Joshua Wells, James Smith, James Saunders and Beverly Waugh—later the rev-

ered senior bishop of the Church—were the incumbents during this time. After it ceased to be used as a church, the tobacco house became a carpenter's shop conducted by James and Electius Middleton. It stood until 1817, when it was destroyed by fire through an accident occurring while a workman was boiling glue. Thus was removed a landmark which indicated an important period in the history of two religious denominations. On October 5, 1810, the trustees of the Methodist Society purchased from Wm. Prout a part of Square 822, located on Fourth Street, between South Carolina Avenue and G Street, S. E., for the sum of two hundred and twenty-seven dollars and sixty-four cents; and proceeded to erect thereon a house of worship suitable to the needs of the growing congregation. The first trustees were Henry Foxall, John Brashears, Electius Middleton, Ambrose White, James Vanzanette, John A. Chambers, Leonard Mackall, John Eliason and Jacob Hoffman. This church was formally dedicated to the worship of God in November, 1811. Beverly Waugh was the pastor. This was the first church built by the Methodists in Washington. It was a brick house of moderate dimensions. The interior was plain. It was not furnished when it was first used. To provide seats, benches, chairs and stools were brought from the homes of the people. Huge box-stoves were used for heating. On very cold days many of the ladies added to their personal comfort by the use of foot warmers which they filled with live coals from the stoves. The lighting was done by means of tallow candles. A chandelier holding a number of candles hung from the center of the ceiling, and candlesticks of various kinds were placed on the pulpit and in other parts of the room. The sexton, intrusted with the task of keeping the lights bright, made a round of all the

candles as often as was necessary during the services—standing on the backs of the seats to reach the chandelier in order to snuff them. If the congregation retained the spirit of devotion during such a repeated performance, we fear their equanimity must have far surpassed that of any present-day audience. In 1819 this church was called Ebenezer, a name which it retained until superseded by another building erected on the same site in 1857-58, during the ministry of W. H. Chapman. No account of early Methodism in the District of Columbia would be complete without a special notice of Henry Foxall, one of the first trustees. Born in England in 1760, he came to America in 1794. His business was that of a founder. Residing at Philadelphia at first, he was for a time the partner of Robert Morris, the great financier of the Revolution. He amassed considerable wealth and was a man of great benevolence of character. He came to the District at the suggestion of Thomas Jefferson, who was an intimate friend. He was at one time mayor of Georgetown. His home was a gathering place of "the wit, beauty and learning of the day." John Quincy Adams, Gouverneur Morris and Francis Scott Key were his frequent guests. The first bored cannon made in America were the work of Foxall. At the battle of Lake Erie, Commodore Perry used guns made at Foxall's foundry and drawn from Georgetown to that place by teams of oxen. He was very liberal toward all the philanthropic movements of the church. He presented a parsonage to the society at Georgetown to which he belonged and of which he was a local preacher. He was active in the work of building Ebenezer Church. After the second war with Great Britain, during which the Capitol and White House were burned, Foxall, believing that his foundry had been providentially pre-

served, built the first Foundry Church as a memorial of the Divine goodness, and presented it free of debt to the society. He died in 1823, while on a visit to his former home in England. In his will he bequeathed five thousand dollars to the Chartered Fund of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the same amount to the Missionary Society of the Wesleyan Church of England. It seems quite certain that no other person had as much to do in the early development of Methodism in Washington as Henry Foxall.

Methodism in the District of Columbia, to-day, consists of the following: Twenty-four churches, valued at nearly one million dollars; fifteen parsonages, valued at more than one hundred thousand dollars; seven thousand and five hundred communicants; thirty Sunday-schools, with more than seven thousand teachers, officers and scholars.